The Victorian Pseudonym and Female Agency

Research Thesis

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Chapter One: The History of the Pseudonym

Anonymity disguises information. For authors, disguised or changed names shrouds their circumstance and background. Pseudonyms, or pen names, have been famously used to disguise one's identity. The word's origin—*pseudṓnymon*—means "false name". The nom de plume allows authors to conduct themselves without judgment attached to their name. Due to an author's sex, personal livelihood, privacy, or a combination of the three, the pen name achieves agency through its protection.

To consider the overall protection of the pseudonym, I will break down the components of a novel's voice. A text is written by a flesh-and-blood, or actual, author. Second, an implied author or omnipresent figure of agency is present throughout the text. Finally, the narrator relates the story to the readers. The pseudonym offers freedom for the actual author because the author becomes two-fold—the pseudonym and the real person, the implied author and the actual author. The pseudonym can take the place of the implied author by acting as the dominant force of the text without revealing the personal information of the flesh-and-blood author.

Carmela Ciuraru, author of *Nom de Plume: A (Secret) History of Pseudonyms*, claims, "If the authorial persona is a construct, never wholly authentic (now matter how autobiographical the material), then the pseudonymous writer takes this notion to yet another level, inventing a construct of a construct" (xiii-xiv). Ciuraru points out that because the author will always act as a construct to readers, the pseudonym is a double-disguise. When the author is covered with the pseudonym, the author's own person is safeguarded and kept from potential censure and criticism. In this thesis, I will explain that though authors have various reasons for disguising their names and status, the reasons often allow the author to voice an opinion without revealing personal details.

A pseudonymous author often chooses to disguise her identity because of societal and historical context. For instance, the modern and celebrated British author J.K. Rowling altered her name to fit the preference of her publishers. Though her last name and first initial remain correct, the middle initial—K—was borrowed from her grandmother's name Kathleen. The choice to alter her name was a marketing ploy to encourage readership for young boys ("Jo Rowling Interview with Oprah"). Even in the 21st century, the female Joanne Rowling changed her name to please a gendered audience.[1] The phenomenon of changing one's name dates centuries back, but for the purpose of this chapter, its concentration will be focused on pseudonyms from the 18th century to the present.

The most famous pseudonymous writer in American history, Mark Twain (né Samuel Clemens), adopted his penname while working with riverboats. The name refers to a phrase riverboats workers would call out. Ciuraru claims that Twain's reason for adopting a penname is not wholly clear, but that doing so "was an exercise in playfulness, in fooling the public solely because he could" (88). Ciuraru believes that the penname comes from Twain's humor. Kevin Donnell asserts that Clemens's pseudonym "made a good proper name and literary persona" (14). Clemens's connection of his pen name with riverboats was crucial to his branding. Mac Donnell proceeds that, "Authors of that day…were keenly aware that their reprinted works often appeared anonymously, and that a well-defined persona and nom de plume would increase the chances that the authorship of a reprinted piece would be credited, thereby spreading a writer's fame and the value of his writings as his audience widened" (25). Donnell explains that Clemens's pseudonym was a strategy to increase Twain's readership and income. Interestingly, though Clemens first dubbed himself "Mark Twain" when he was a journalist, the popularity of it replaced his actual name. Ciuraru argues that Twain was "a restless lover of reinvention and

[1] Not to mention her second pseudonym, Robert Galbraith, is also a male name.

his new name allowed him to step into a role the he had conjured, and that he alone controlled" (92). Ciuraru calls his name a conjuring, but I would argue that his name is not a fabricated self, but a reflection of who he wanted to be as an author. The control and influence that Mark Twain owned in the 19th century American literary marketplace was constructed through his choice of pseudonym, but his success was a consequence of his intriguing stories and novels. The pseudonym may have allowed him the self-confidence to produce his works and can be seen as a double-disguise, but unlike other pseudonymous authors, his penname became his real identity.

Not all pseudonymous writers achieved or wished for the public fame Twain achieved. For instance, Sylvia Plath, under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas, did not achieve momentous fame while alive. It was her tragic suicide that contributed to her great posthumous fame. During her lifetime, Plath sought recognition, but was denied the access that a writer such as Twain was awarded. The release of her book *The Bell Jar* did not receive the acclaim she had hoped for, and she killed herself one month after its publication. Tracy Brain, author of *The Other Sylvia Plath*, avows that "nothing on the cover of this first edition, no aspect of its packaging, would have made the reader suspect that Victoria Lucas was a pseudonym, much less suspect the pseudonym was a mask worn by Sylvia Plath" (1). Brain's depiction of Plath's pseudonym is noteworthy because today her pseudonym is forgotten, replaced with her actual name. Later in the thesis, I will discuss public speculation around the identity of pseudonyms (the Brontë sisters and George Eliot). But unlike the Brontës and Eliot, Plath/Lucas did not receive the same acclaim as a pseudonymous writer. Instead, Plath's protagonist—Esther Greenwood—is publicly considered autobiographical and can be used to read Plath's choice for a pseudonym.

In *The Bell Jar*, Esther Greenwood talks about anonymity on three different occasions. The first occasion is when she lies about her identity to a group of men she meets at a New York

bar. "'My name's Elly Higginbottom," I said. "I come from Chicago." After that I felt safer. I didn't want anything I said or did that night to be associated with me and my real name and coming from Boston" (13). Esther as Elly doesn't feel limited by her real name and background. She frees herself from her reservations of her name in a social situation with a fake name. The second instance is when Esther daydreams her stories will be noticed by the publishing house she interns for. "I decided I'd surprise Jay Cee and send in a couple of the stories I wrote in this class under a pseudonym…the Fiction Editor would come in to Jay Cee personally…and say, "Here's something a cut above the usual," and Jay Cee would accept them and ask the author out to lunch and it would be me" (115). In this passage, Esther dreams about using an actual pseudonym and having her talent realized without using her own name. She wants her skill to speak for itself and believes it could lead her to greatness. The third occurrence is when Esther is home in Connecticut, attempting to write a novel. "My heroine would be myself, only in disguise. She would be called Elaine. Elaine. I counted the letters on my fingers. There were six letters in Esther, too. It seemed like a lucky thing" (134). Esther projects her self-image into her literature, attempting to prove her relevance through her heroine. By using a different name, Esther believes she can hide her personal identity, become a successful writer, and still provide relevance for why *she* as a person is important.

At the heart of *The Bell Jar* is a deep need for acceptance and acknowledgment. Esther is constantly assessing her own worth and dissatisfaction with the world around her. Because Esther is a projection of Sylvia—a first name that, like Elaine, also has exactly six letters—the narrative shows Plath's need for acclaim and a belief that with it, she could achieve happiness. As mentioned earlier, the pseudonym can take on the role of the implied author. In the case of Sylvia Plath, Victoria Lucas revealed Plath's suffering without giving away her identity. But

Plath's crossover of self-contentment and literary success prove her need for acknowledgment was greater than her need for concealment. By hoping to emerge a popular author without her personal name, she only found dissatisfaction. In part, Plath's lack of fame counteracts the need for protection. When she achieved posthumous fame, her mother and family were assaulted with *The Bell Jar*'s autobiographical content. Thus, Plath's use of the pseudonym did not disguise her troubles. Nevertheless, she did not suffer the consequences of exposing her personal life while alive.

While Plath achieved fame posthumously, Charles Dodgson ironically dodged fame as Lewis Carroll his entire life. The eccentric and acclaimed writer separated his two selves—the Oxford mathematician and the zany author. Alastair Fowler claims that Dodgson held "two names for two distinct identities", and furthermore that he "knew that names cannot easily be categorized as meaningful or meaningless" (2). I would argue that names are very rarely meaningless, and in the case of Charles Dodgson, both of his names held great weight. Fowler comes to his conclusion when he cites Carroll's scene of Alice asking Humpty-Dumpty "*must* a name mean something?" And of course, Humpty's response resonates with Dodgson's own experience—"Of course it must…my name means the shape I am…With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost" (Carroll). Humpty Dumpty's name is a visual onomatopoeia; he means exactly what he is. Alice, however, could be anything—almost—she's still a girl. Her name is gendered, automatically categorizing her as a female. Here, it seems Carroll is commenting on the gender arbitrariness of naming. A name itself doesn't seem to mean anything, but its connotations and associations separate people into categories. In his lifetime, Dodgson publicly disputed any relation to Carroll. And his separate personas, Dodgson and Carroll, were not to intersect. Humpty tells Alice—"you might be any shape". Dodgson took

two. Ciuraru intercedes that Dodgson chose “a pseudonym precisely to protect himself from the burdens of celebrity” (75). Yet Dodgson performed two different selves—the author of Alice’s narrative (Carroll) and the scholar (Dodgson).

Thus far, I have discussed Twain, Plath, and Dodgson. Plath and Dodgson chose a pen name for reasons of anonymity and privacy. Twain, on the other hand, chose it to expand his literary persona. Each of these authors found agency and voice through their nom de plumes. But how does the exertion of agency affect society? In Alexander Beider’s article “Scientific Approach to Etymology of Surnames”, he conducts a study to derive a scientific reason for the origins and continuation of surnames. But among his research, Beider reports:

> [C]ertain questions that deal with deeply psychological reasons [for naming] are outside of the scientific approach in onomastics. Among the examples are: Why did one individual adopt a surname related to his place of origin, while another, during the same period and in the same place, chose a surname drawn from the given name of his father? Why did one individual construct the surname from the common noun that designated his occupation, while another whose occupation was identical drew it from the common noun that designated the main tool used in this activity? (92).

Bieder admits that certain choices confound a scientific reasoning for naming. His admission highlights that historically, individuals have had the autonomy to change their names. Though the surnames originate from various sources, different individuals found importance in different reasoning. Beider’s study attempts to find scientific grounding for the origin of surnames, but he recognizes naming’s complexity. Like individuals who choose different surnames for different reasons, the pseudonymous writer creates a name with a purpose that can become his/her new

identity. Several pseudonymous writers of the 19th century, such as Lewis Carroll and George Eliot, are still cited by their pen names, rather than their birth names.

Controversy is often the reason that authors adopt pseudonyms. Though authors such as Eliot and Carroll used anonymity to escape controversy in their personal lives, other writers used pseudonyms to protect their own lives from the controversial content of their books. Two female pseudonymous authors, George Sand and Anne Declos, exerted agency through their controversial material. George Sand, born Amantine-Lucile-Aurore Dupin, would become one of the most popular French novelists of 19th century France (Ciuraru 27-29). Noted for cross-dressing, cigar smoking, and bisexuality, Sand adopted "doubleness" in her life—both literally and literarily. Her behavior was deviant in 19th century society—she violated social norms to please herself—granting herself autonomy. Later in the chapter, I will examine Sand's pseudonym from a gendered lens, but in this section, I want to introduce the pseudonym's ability to incite controversy.

Before the publication of her first solo novel, *Indiana*, George Sand wrote, "I had scarcely thought about the name I was supposed to put on the "leather bindings." In any case, I resolved to remain anonymous" (*Histoire de Ma Vie* 907). Sand's choice was not controversial per se because she chose anonymity, but because readers could not seek a viable flesh-and-blood author to stake authority on. Readers find solace in the authority of an author. Sand's *Indiana* found critical acclaim from its condemnation of marriage and gave her the confidence to publish under her pseudonym. After receiving fame and censure for her publications, Sand's identity was inevitably revealed. Despite the reveal, Sand did not change her behaviors (cross-dressing, etc.) She wrote, "I flattered myself that I could move about unnoticed in the most humble literary crowd. On seeing that, in spite of myself, this was no longer possible and that all of my work—

including my pen name—was being attacked viciously, I retained the name and pursued the work. To do otherwise would have been cowardly" (908). Sand had a very clear idea of what is "right" and "wrong" in her personal world. To be cowardly is to be dishonest and wrong. And in this way, her "right" contradicts the decorum of her time. Sand confidently chose personal autonomy over societal demands repeatedly throughout her lifetime.

Compared to the bold and impassioned Sand, the 20th century French author Anne Declos can be viewed from a different light. Declos wrote under two pseudonyms in her lifetime—Dominique Aury and Pauline Réage. Ciuraru notes "as a journalist and a translator, she discarded her original name, Anne Declos, erasing it entirely from her personal and professional life. Almost no one knew that Aury was not actually her own name; she kept that fact a secret" (315). Under the disguise of Aury, Declos become a proper, intellectual voice in the French literary world. But her book, *Historie D'O,* was written under the pen name Pauline Réage and caused censure and commotion across France. *Historie D'O* was a sadomasochistic novel of a woman's complete sexual submission. The book's sensation led the French government to attempt placing obscenity charges against the unidentifiable author. With Declos, there are two distinct identities: the academic, demure Aury and the sensational Réage. The two identities bring to mind Dodgson's two personas. However, Declos made not one, but two pseudonyms, and though Aury became her personal identity, it must be questioned why she chose a new name.

Logistically, Ciuraru points out that Declos "had chosen "Dominique" for its gender neutrality, and "Aury" was derived from her mother's maiden name, "Auricoste" (Ciuraru 315). I would like to compare Aury's changed personal name to Twain's. Twain's self-branding tactic is similar to Aury's. By making his penname accessible to his audience, he created an authorial persona that Americans found captivating. Likewise, Aury chose a name accessible to her

literary circle. Réage, though, is more cumbersome to decipher. Bonnie Shullenberger argues that *Historie D'O* is "an attempt to establish an acknowledgment of obedience, transcendence, self-denial, and free will in the absence of God and in the absence of a religious environment that makes such practices otherwise coherent" (250). Though Shullenberger's point comes from literary spiritual analysis, her reading coincides with a recurrent ideal in *Historie D'O*. Merging obedience and transcendence may illuminate one's true self. Declos said that Réage was "not me entirely and yet in some obscure way is: when I move from one me to the other fragments scatter, then come together again in a pattern that I'm sure is ever-changing. I find it harder and harder to tell them apart anymore" ("The Unmasking of O."). There are various facets to a person, even unacknowledged wants and desires. O finds total freedom through submission; She finds transcendence through obedience. Declos' explanation of her fragmented self shows that she grappled with recognizing her pseudonym as part of herself. Though Réage is a fiction, Declos created her. Declos is neither Aury nor Réage, but all three reflect each other. Rewriting one's self is not purely autobiographical, but it is also not purely fiction. The pseudonymous writer must blur the perceived self and the actual self. Without this blurring, the distinction would lose meaning.

Up until now, I have discussed pseudonyms in relation to anonymity. Anonymity comes from a personal choice of safety, privacy, and even marketing. For the majority of these authors, anonymity comes with a price that truth can only hide for so long. In the case of Dodgson and Plath, the pseudonym separated them from publicity. Twain used his pseudonym for personal branding and gain. But for Sand and Declos, a gendered reading must be imposed. Sand adopted a male name and Declos adopted a gender-ambiguous first pseudonym. Furthermore, scholars judged both authors because of their gender. Sand noted that her reviewers "all spoke of Mr. G

Sand enthusiastically, but insisting that a woman's hand must have glided across it here and there to reveal to the author certain delicacies of heart and mind, while declaring the style and discrimination were too virile to be anything but a man's" (907). Comparatively Réage's reviewers found the "authorial voice was too direct, too cool to be that of a woman… others insisted that no man could have offered such a nuanced exploration of a woman's psyche" (Ciuraru 310). These two reviews were separated by a century, but the typified gender expectations of female and male writers remained relatively the same. For many females who used pen names, anonymity was desirable because of society's sexism. To become a male writer was and is to become serious, academic, legitimate, and most of all, powerful.

Gilbert and Gubar have been famously cited for opening *The Madwoman in the Attic* with the line "Is the pen a metaphorical penis?" They go on to say, "Male sexuality, in other words, is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power. The poet's pen is in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis" (3-4). While their point has been analyzed, quoted, and superseded by current critics, it is one that lies at the heart of examining female writers who used male pseudonyms. In the next chapter, I will observe gendered reasoning for pseudonyms and how privacy, safety, and anonymity intersect to form a gendered lens of reading pseudonymous authors. These women superseded the stigma of female authorship by creating a male title. In reconsidering George Sand's reason for adopting a male pen name, it can be found that her pen name legitimatized her personal aim of authorship and created a mystery and intrigue in the literary world. But furthermore, though her identity was revealed, she continued to publish under her pseudonym. Even though her disguise was mostly withdrawn, she became a legitimatized version of her pseudonym. She became her implied author because it gave her both autonomy and aim.

Chapter 2: Gender and the Pseudonym

Victorian femininity was coded with unwritten societal customs and behaviors. But femininity and gender are fluid concepts. As Judith Butler asserts, "We act and walk and speak in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman…we act as if being a man or being a woman is an internal reality… it's a phenomenon that's being produced… and reproduced all the time" (Your Behavior Creates Your Gender). Butler's reasoning is central to gender studies; gender is a performed act, therefore, gender expectations are socially constructed. An author's choice to use a pseudonym can be analyzed by his or her sex, race, religion and various classifications that impact his or her story and experiences.

Through gender construction, I aim to examine how authors used pseudonyms to exert personal autonomy. Agency, or the exertion of power, is crucial to the success of a text and its author. This thesis will focus on George Eliot and the Brontë sisters who used male pennames to gain intellectual seriousness from readers. Their social commentary, which will be explored in Chapter 3, is dependent on the female experience. Though the male pseudonym was the gateway for recognition of Eliot and the Brontë's texts, it allowed their novels to legitimize varied female experiences. Through the pseudonym, both male and female writers use their written skill to exert influence. In this chapter, I will discuss gender's relation to the pseudonym by examining Eliot and Brontë's predecessors and contemporaries, Eliot and Brontë themselves, and men who use female pseudonyms.

Section I: Females Who Used Pseudonyms

To understand the female pseudonymous writer, it is important to look at historical context. Prior to the Victorian novelists Eliot and the Brontës came the Regency era novelist Jane Austen. Austen never signed her novels with her name. She is one of the most famed British

novelists, but her original novels bore no signature. Instead, they were signed "By A Lady" and subsequently "By the Author of *Sense and Sensibility*" and so forth. Austen was not the first author to keep her name private. One of her predecessors, Fanny Burney, wrote *Evelina* or *The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* anonymously. The difference between Austen's work and Burney's is that *Evelina* was published in 1778 with no authorial name, and *Sense and Sensibility* (Austen's first published novel) was published in 1811 with the signature "By A Lady". By signing as a woman, Austen wasn't bothered by the judgment of fitting into a niche. Rather, her choice claims there was nothing inappropriate about being a lady novelist. However, it should be noted that a contemporary exposed Burney's identity while Austen's identity was revealed after her death. These women elected to disguise their names in a culture where publicity was not favored for women. Some thirty years later, *Jane Eyre*, a novel also concerning a young woman's entrance into the world, was not published anonymously, but with a male name. In the mid-19th century, the renowned Brontë sisters changed the nature of pseudonym use. Writing under the gender-ambiguous names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell, the sisters established an authorial choice that contemporaries and critics would analyze for years.

Although Charlotte, Emily, and Anne are now celebrated for their wealth of talent in one family, they chose to disguise their identities under male pen names. Many noted academics have claimed the sisters feared their readers and contemporaries would be prejudiced against their writing because they were women. Perhaps as Barker notes, their choice to mask their identities was also influenced by their rural location in Haworth of West Yorkshire, England (103). They did not want to risk publicity at the loss of their domestic privacy.

Similar to the Brontës is George Eliot, an author celebrated for her depiction of provincial English life. Marian Evans, also known as Mary Ann Evans or Marian Evans Lewes,

became under her pen name George Eliot one of the greatest English novelists of the 19th century. Eliot revealed her identity after impostors claimed they were the famed "George Eliot". Even after her confession, she would continue to publish under her pen name for her entire life (Henry 90). Like Sand and the Brontës, Eliot's admission did not deter her publications or popularity.

From Austen to the Victorians, there was a change in the use of anonymity. By the time the Brontës were writing, the sisters were aware Austen was a famous female author. Austen did not need to hide her identity with a male name because her content was not controversial for woman. Alastair Fowler argues that nineteenth century women used pseudonyms for two reasons. A "modest wish for anonymity may have been one motive; another, surely, was the desire to compete with male writers on equal terms" (152). Fowler also notes that it was not necessary for women to publish under pseudonyms. In fact, Elizabeth Gaskell's publisher, William Howlitt, told her "it would be advantageous if her works "were known as the work of a lady". Nevertheless she tried, too late, for the pen name Stephen Berwick, and in the event the novel [*Mary Barton*] was published anonymously" (152). As Fowler points out, Gaskell didn't write under a male pseudonym, but she also wasn't published under a female name. The anonymity gave her the freedom to be controversial so she could comment on unsuitable structures for women.

When Gaskell's next novel, *Ruth*, was released, she faced adversity. *Ruth* narrates the story of a "fallen woman" with an illegitimate child. In her letters, Gaskell claims "I shrink from more pain than I can tell you from what people are saying… it is a prohibited book in *this* [household], as in many other households; not a book for young people…but I have spoken out my mind in the best way I can, and I have no doubt what was meant so earnestly *must* do some

good" (*The Letters* 221). Gaskell's pain from her work's reception is severe. When she signed her novel with her own name, her morality was questioned. For Austen, gender anonymity was not necessary for her novels to be well received. Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë, on the hand, were critiqued based on their controversial content. The two women coexisted in a literary moment where women's work was either unsuitably controversial or not considered highbrow. *Mary Barton* and *Jane Eyre* were both released in 1848; *Ruth* and *Villette* were published in 1853. Unlike Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë was able to escape some censure because of her pseudonym. Its gender ambiguity allowed Brontë creative freedom even after her identity was revealed. George Eliot famously commented, "*Villette* is a still more wonderful book than *Jane Eyre*. There is something almost preternatural in its power". On *Ruth*, Gaskell wrote, "I could have put out much more power, but I wanted to keep it quiet in tone, lest by the slightest exaggeration, or overstrained sentiment I might weaken the force of what I had to say" (*The Letters* 221). *Ruth* was criticized both for its controversy and its passive heroine; Gaskell's material was too coarse for a woman, but her protagonist was too submissive. The controversies surrounding her novel prove the difficulties women writers who wrote under their own names faced.

The Brontës were able to escape denial of agency through their pseudonyms. In her second edition to the preface of the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, Charlotte Brontë gave an explanation for her use of the pseudonym:

> Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because – without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called "feminine"— we had a vague impression that authoresses

> are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise.

Charlotte's declaration pinpoints her reasoning for pseudonym use: she was disgusted by publicity and prejudice against female authors. This gives a clear-cut explanation for the use of the penname. But, Charlotte's decision to reveal the sisters' disguise is more intricate. She declared that the three sisters were not one entity, but three separate authors. Charlotte's insisted this point because she was embarrassed her work could be mistaken as Anne Brontë's. On Emily's writings, however, Charlotte wrote, "something more than surprise seized me – a deep conviction that these were not common effusions" and that they were "terse, vigorous and genuine…melancholy, and elevating". On Anne, she writes, "I could not but be a partial judge, yet I thought that those verses, too, had a sweet sincere pathos of their own". Charlotte's critical reception of her own sisters' works shows what she perceives as strong, successful writing. She calls Anne's writing "sweet"—a word regularly associated with femininity, whereas she calls Emily's writing "vigorous" and "elevating"—general characteristics associated with masculinity. Levels of hierarchy are littered through the Brontë's texts—the male over the female, the rich over the poor, etc. To suggest that Charlotte Brontë herself established a hierarchy between her sisters—whether she realized it or not—presents a system of written privilege. Charlotte received more fame for her novels than Anne. To this day, Anne is the least famous of the sisters. Though Anne's works were less famous, she nevertheless strongly exerts agency.

In 1848, two years prior to Charlotte's preface, Anne wrote the second preface of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. "Respecting the author's identity, I would have it be distinctly understood that Acton Bell is neither Currer nor Ellis Bell, and therefore let not his faults be

attributed to them. As to whether the name be real or fictitious, it cannot greatly signify to those who know him only by his works" (xxv). Anne mentions the separation of the authors, but unlike Charlotte, she concentrates on the pseudonym itself. She continues, "As little, I should think, can it matter whether the writer so designated is a man, or a woman… I am satisfied that if a book is a good one, it is so whatever the sex of the author may be. All novels are, or should be, written for both men and women to read" (xxv). Her stark declaration has nothing "sweet" about it. She directly exerts agency by claiming that the authenticity of her text is not based on the gender or the name of the author. Instead, its importance is its content. In the next chapter, I will examine how the Brontës exerted agency by creating unconventional heroines who embodied strength despite gender restrictions.

In contrast to the Brontës, George Eliot had no sister as a competitor or supporter. Her push to become a novelist came from her quasi-husband George Henry Lewes. George Eliot chose the pseudonym "George" from Lewes's first name and the last name Eliot because it was a good, solid English name (Ciuraru 55). In a letter to a friend, G.H. Lewes declares: "the object of anonymity was to get the book [*Scenes of A Clerical Life*] judged by its own merits, and not prejudged as the work of a woman… It is quite clear that people would have sniffed at it if they had known the writer to be a woman but they can't now unsay their admiration" (*The George Eliot Letters*). To create a credible piece of literature, Eliot used not just a gender-ambiguous pseudonym, but a male one. The penname had two functions for Eliot—agency and protection. Lewes's claim that Eliot was "a particular woman" comes from their untraditional relationship. Lewes was still married to his former wife (Agnes Jervis) and could not divorce her because he was the legal father of three of her children. The pseudonym protected Eliot's reputation from scorn—an unmarried woman living with a married man was scandalous and would certainly

affect the reputation of a Victorian author. Secondly, the pseudonym, as Lewes noted, gave her the chance to publish without gender discrimination. Since Eliot did not conform to Victorian standards as a woman or an author, her controversial decisions comment that society's influence is limited and cannot control a woman's actions. In the next chapter, I will explain how Eliot's *Middlemarch* supports a feminist reading of gendered writing and action, proving that a female's actions are not limited to society's expectations.

Section II: Males who Used Female Pseudonyms

To examine the full scope of pseudonym use, this section will note male authors who used female pseudonyms and compare them to females who used male pennames. Similar to the previously mentioned pseudonymous authors, these authors used female titles to exert agency in feminine-based writing. Male authors who used female pseudonyms tend to fall into two categories—so-called 'editors' and fully adopted pen names.

During the 18th century, some male authors strategically disguised themselves as overseers of women's biographies. *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* by Samuel Richardson was first published in 1740. The first edition listed no author and, instead, included a description to convince the reader of its authentic content. Written in the epistolary form, the story claims to be "a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young damsel, to her parents" (1). The title page goes on to state: "Now first published in order to cultivate the principles of VIRTUE and RELIGION in the Minds of the YOUTH of BOTH SEXES. A narrative which has its Foundation in TRUTH and NATURE". *Pamela* tells the story of a young maidservant who rejects her master's attempts to seduce her. Ultimately, her will power is rewarded; she marries her master, elevating her social and class status.

Richardson's novel was an instant success in 18th century England. For its audience, the story concerns "social and sexual politics… finding in Richardson's euphoric tale of social mobility and transgressive marriage a set of provocative messages about gender and class" (Keymer and Sabor 5). Richardson's tale discussed fluid social dimensions where a person's ascribed status can change. The narrative composes a series of letters, which disjoints the anonymous author from suspicion. Richardson's anonymity focused the novel on the tale of a young, virtuous female, fooling the reader into believing the assumed author was the main character. He made the depiction of navigating social strata a positive female experience, which allowed the public to consider female social capabilities and progressions.

Interestingly, Charlotte Brontë mimics this format with *Jane Eyre*. Posing Currer Bell as an editor, the original publication read: "Jane Eyre. An Autobiography. Edited by Currer Bell". Brontë's "autobiography" tells the same "Foundation in TRUTH and NATURE" that Richardson enacted for *Pamela*. Both novels are bildungsroman and use the façade of their protagonists as a quasi-author. Yet with Brontë, a double guise is used. Not only is the story fictional and complied by an "editor", but the editor listed is not a real person. Brontë's 1847 publication is determinedly more feminist than Richardson's 1740 novel. Yet, both accomplish similar feats. *Jane Eyre* and *Pamela* both tell the story of a lowly woman who is elevated through her master. Though Jane is able to escape her master and Pamela must succumb to Mr. B's restrictions, the two stories evaluate social expectations and defy them.

Though there are fewer men cited who used opposite-gender pseudonyms than women, there are a few key examples. Benjamin Franklin famously used both male and female pseudonyms on various occasions to argue issues that were not accepted under his own name or that he felt were important to publish. One of his main female pseudonyms, Polly Baker,

commented on the way women were treated wrongly by the law (“Name That Ben.”) In comparison to his other nom de plumes, Polly Baker is a believable name. Baker’s letters discussed the unethical punishments against women who had illegitimate children while the fathers went unpunished (“Name That Ben.”) Franklin used this pseudonym to address serious issues for women, whereas he used his other pseudonyms when he wrote gossip and satire. The creation of Baker reveals Franklin’s feminism and allowed him to comment on women’s issues in colonial America.

Apart from pseudonymous letter writers, certain genres appear to have pseudonymous male authors. Several 20th century romance novelists used female pseudonyms to mask their male identities. John Creasey, a famous English crime and science fiction writer, wrote over 600 novels with 28 different pseudonyms. Though his usage was wide, he wrote fourteen romance novels under the pseudonym Margaret Cooke (“The John Creasey Online Resource.”) Similarly, Thomas Huff wrote various romance novels and gothic fiction under female pen names—most famously Jennifer Wilde (“Jennifer Wilde”). Likewise, Bill Spense wrote romantic novels under the pen name Jessica Blair ("Jessica Blair - Novels.") This interesting trend characterizes women as the main writers of romance and stereotypes it as a female genre.

In *A Natural History of the Romance Novel*, Pamela Regis argues that in school, women are taught to read male experiences as representative of the human experience. Men, however, are not taught the same in relation to female protagonists. This interesting dichotomy provides a possible reason for why males generally don’t use female pseudonyms. Why would a man use a female pen name when a male name is a more socially credible source of agency? In the case of romance novels, the gendering of an author may offer comfort to a gendered audience. A woman could feel more comfortable reading a romance novel written by a woman. When Bill Spense

was told by his publishers to adopt a female pen name, he noted, “You do not say no to publishers. I was just very glad I had found someone who wanted to print my books, and it didn't bother me at all that I'd been given a female name” (*The Telegraph*). Spense’s response is rational—he pleased his publishers to sell his books. He is an inverted example of J.K. Rowling’s name change, proving that in some circumstances, men do experience gender prejudice because of a novel’s content.

A final pseudonymous male author to mention is Adela Quebec—the pseudonym used by Gerald Berners, the 14th Lord Berners. His work, *The Girls of Radcliff Hall*, was a privately circulated roman à clef novel. Published in 1932, the book cast Berners and his close friends—Cecil Beaton and Oliver Messel—as lesbian schoolmates who performed sexual acts (Jones 101). As I stated in the previous chapter, Dominique Aury wrote *Histoire D’O*, a scandalous sexual novel, under the pseudonym Pauline Réage. Similarly to Aury, Berners’ novel was reproached. In fact, Beaton attempted to have all its copies destroyed, causing a very low circulation (Tamagne 124). Berners used a pseudonym to disguise his gender and his personal name from condemnation (though he did not achieve this). Likewise, Aury did not want the publicity attached to her work. Though Aury wrote *Histoire D’O* as an extended love letter to her partner, and Berners is considered a dilettante, both authors wrote a book of sexual endeavors shielded by a pseudonym. If the genres of romance and sex are more appealing written under female pseudonyms, then it seems the female author is only credible when dealing with characteristically “feminine” subject material.

On Charlotte Brontë’s decision to use a penname, Sandro Jung asserts that “recognizing that her own and her sisters’ ‘mode of writing and thinking’ could not be classified under the umbrella term of ‘feminine’ placed her in the position of a writer adopting a masculine manner

of writing, an action that period critics conceived of as an unnatural border crossing" (294). Jung's point disputes the need for a female voice to author a 'feminine' narrative. Charlotte's decision to use a male pseudonym contradicts the argument that females can only write on "feminine" experiences. *Jane Eyre* is a text on a female character in non-feminine spaces (a man's household, the open terrain of England, etc.) written by a female. Even though it was originally published under a gender ambiguous name, it demonstrates that female agency expands beyond "feminine" spaces. Romances might achieve better success under a female name because females are considered credible for romantic narratives. But this cannot serve as the full reason for why feminine agency is associated with what was and is deemed as "feminine". In the literary world, the Brontës and George Eliot show that what is considered masculine can be attributed to a female. Therefore, a female using a male pseudonym is not defying femininity, but morphing the categorizations of masculinity and femininity into one performed action.

To return to this discussion on gender as performative and authorial identity as a construction, I want to comment on Elizabeth Rigby's review of *Jane Eyre*. As a contemporary of Brontë's, Rigby criticized *Jane Eyre* in an anonymous review. The discussion, then, was conducted by a woman under the guise of anonymity writing about a woman's novel written under the guise of a man. Perhaps what is most interesting about the review is that Rigby declares that Bell/the author is most certainly a man:

> Without entering into the question whether the power of the writing be above her [a female writer], or the vulgarity below her, there are, we believe, minutiae of circumstantial evidence which at once acquit the feminine hand. No woman--a lady friend, whom we are always happy to consult, assures us—makes mistakes in her own métier—no woman trusses game and garnishes dessert-dishes with the same hands, or

> talks of so doing in the same breath. Above all, no woman attires another in such fancy dresses as Jane's ladies assume… This evidence seems incontrovertible. Even granting that these incongruities were purposely assumed, for the sake of disguising the female pen, there is nothing gained; for if we ascribe the book to a woman at all, we have no alternative but to ascribe it to one who has, for some sufficient reason, long forfeited the society of her own sex. (*The London Quarterly Review*)

Rigby's review is, on the whole, largely disapproving. She calls the novel "very unnatural and very unjust". But Rigby's opinion of "natural" discredits her when she pins gender normativity on the novel's author and content. She claims the author is male because he lacks knowledge on lady's clothing. Rigby's assertion and agency rests on her authority as a critic, but her critique is wrong. Julie Sheldon argues that by "assuming a male authorial voice, [Rigby] presents her view that Jane Eyre was written by a man" and that "the contrivance of 'a lady friend' maintains the fiction of her masculine authority for general readers whilst winking in the direction of those who know better" (835). Rigby attempts to provide authority over *Jane Eyre*'s author by critiquing its "male" authorial voice while maintaining a male façade of her own. Sheldon's point that Rigby "winks" at those who know better shows that Rigby's anonymity was not entirely protected. Sheldon notes that Rigby was one of a small number of female reviewers, who "enjoyed an unusually privileged position from which she was able to disrupt some of the conventions of the review process; settling old scores, reviewing her own work, and trading private jokes" (835). As a reviewer, Rigby exerted female agency. She was not only considered credible as a woman, but she also benefited from it. Rigby claims "if we ascribe the book to a woman at all" she has "forfeited the society of her own sex". Rigby believes that Jane's actions

are the antithesis of femininity, yet to credit this viewpoint, she has to disguise her own feminine identity. And therefore Rigby's mistake proves that Brontë exerts female agency.

When Jane Eyre declares, "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! - I have as much soul as you, - and full as much heart", she defends herself passionately and establishes that her appearance and social status do not reflect her character. Though the pseudonym "Bell" was the gateway for readers to recognize Brontë's importance, female agency within *Jane Eyre* proves the relevance of women's actions. Like Jane's passionate declaration, characters in the works of George Eliot and the Brontës sisters exert agency. In the next chapter, I will examine these unconventional heroines who embodied strength despite gender restrictions.

Chapter Three: The Victorian Pseudonym and the Novel

I've argued that the pseudonym enables the female writer's agency. An author's agency rests on the agency of the novel—its themes, symbolism, and message—and its ability to influence. The author conveys influential messages through characters who discuss provocative opinions and react to complicated situations. And most importantly, characters defend their arguments and deal with issues through writing. In this chapter, I will discuss characters from the novels of George Eliot, Anne Brontë, and Charlotte Brontë who exert agency through letter writing, narration, and female professions. The heroines mimic the pseudonymous shield by enabling agency through action. When the female character makes active decisions, she represents the agency exerted by the pseudonymous author.

Part I: Helen Graham: The Unconventional Heroine

As I mentioned in Chapter II, Anne Brontë has been recognized as the demure Brontë sister. However, her fiction and preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* are evidence against her "demureness". Her protagonists maintain a high moral decorum, but their actions and messages contain feminist arguments that portray unyielding strength. Her character Helen Graham of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* offers a new view of "womankind": one that challenges traditional Victorian femininity by transforming the unconventional woman into an accepted, loved, and successful woman. For example, Helen's nonconformity can be clearly read in the following passage: "Mrs Graham took her camp-stool and drawing materials…she left us and proceeded along the steep, stony hill, to a loftier, more precipitous eminence at some distance, whence a still finer prospect was to be had, where she preferred taking her sketch, though some of the ladies told her it was a frightful place, and advised her not to attempt it" (Brontë 57). Helen is neither frightened nor disturbed by the precipice. Furthermore, the

women's censure does not affect her. This "frightful" place mirrors her own existence: She is now set away from others, seen as dangerous, and is independent through solitude. Brontë created a character that challenged Victorian gender norms, and moreover introduced an unconventional and independent femininity. Because Helen takes it upon herself to paint in a dangerous position, she acts as a model of courage and free will. Aside from her unconventional painting decision, Helen interacts in a reverse gender situation with Markham—her suitor.

Helen exerts agency through untraditional measures, one of which is her veiled proposal to Markham. "This rose is not so fragrant as a summer flower, but it has stood through hardships none of *them* could bear… Will you have it?" (Brontë 450). In this moment, Helen takes on the role of the suitor. Markham is slow in his interpretation of her words and must be reassured by Helen with "Have I not said enough?" (Brontë 451). She fulfills a typically male role through her actions. Markham does not understand Helen's reference and she must illuminate him. Throughout the novel, Helen's teaching helps reform and educate Markham. Elizabeth Langland argues that "Helen's radical re-education of her son parallels the re-education of Gilbert Markham, and both underscore Anne Brontë's trenchant critique of male education and of the whole Victorian patriarchal system" (138). Langland claims that it is Helen's reform of both her son and her suitor that re-educates men from a deficient Victorian education. But additionally, re-education is linked to the female experience. If Helen can use her authority as a mother and a potential lover to teach the men in her life, then is not Brontë declaring that to re-educate men, they must respect women as authoritative? Helen is an emblem of feminism. She is autonomous through her artwork, her break from her husband, and her dealings with Markham. But to re-educate, Helen's lessons partially come from a very private place—her diary. She tells Markham, "I have not spent my solitude in utter idleness, and I am not speaking now from the impulse of

the moment…Trust my words rather than your own feelings now" (Brontë 371-72). Helen's words are the authority of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*—she has more power and credibility than Markham—she is the central agent of the novel.

Helen's agency is outlined through her written word—her diary. *The Tenant of Wildfell* is presented in three sections—Gilbert Markham's letter to his friend Jack Halford in 1847, the happenings during 1827 when Helen Graham enters Gilbert's neighborhood, and Helen's diaries of her life at Grassdale with Arthur Huntingdon (1821 to 1827). Gilbert's narrative encompasses Helen's, and in several ways can be seen to contradict her voice—he reveals to Halford in 1847 what Helen told him privately in 1827. When she laid the diary in his hands, she proclaimed: "don't breathe a word of what it tells you to any living being. I trust to your honour" (Chapter XV). Markham's decision to go against her word is ethically questionable, yet without it, Helen's story is not broadcasted to the reader. Earlier in the novel, Helen remarks "I would not send a poor girl into the world, unarmed against her foes, and ignorant of the snares that beset her path; nor would I watch and guard her, till, deprived of self-respect and self-reliance, she lost the power or the will to watch and guard herself" (Brontë 25). Though Helen is retrospectively speaking of herself, her disclosure achieves meaning in the narrative—she wards off young women from the ills of poor choices and disreputable men. Similarly, in Brontë's preface, she states, "if I have… prevented one thoughtless girl from falling into the very natural error of my heroine, the book has not been written in vain" (Brontë xxiv). Thus Brontë and Helen work together to create a heroic narrative. Its nature is not traditional—rather than follow a young woman free from societal influence, Bronte writes the story of a young woman who is already stained by society. Yet, Helen's story is her success. Despite Brontë and Helen's warning about possible pitfalls in youth, Helen is able to rectify her mistake and gains autonomy.

I would argue that Helen's role as an artist is indicative of Anne Brontë's view about what women are capable of and their contribution to the social and cultural marketplace. Antonia Losano argues "we must see the scenes of painting in *Tenant* as barometers for the novel's radical view of women's role as creative producers… At the narrative level, the novel's many scenes of painting provide its readers with detailed, if oblique, guidelines for interpretation, and the novel is formally and ideologically impacted by the presence of its painter-heroine". Losano's argument complements mine. As a painter, Helen is an active force of change. Through art, Helen becomes independent, and through creativity, she forms a social opinion. Interestingly, the paintings of Helen and the writings of Brontë were two of the only ways women could earn a livelihood in the nineteenth century. Their incomes are telling of a greater social change for women—a way to become self-sustainable. Furthermore, the imagery of paintings and the themes of literature gave women the autonomy to voice opinions. Though their comments were not free from discretion, they entered the world of social politics, a world that had been exclusively male. Brontë comments in her preface: "Let it not be imagined, however, that I consider myself competent to reform the errors and abuses of society, but only that I would fain to contribute my humble quota towards so good an aim" (Brontë xxiv). By contributing her "humble quota", Brontë reveals the realities of inequality and legitimatizes the strength of opinion a woman can possess.

Helen's unconventional heroism mimics Brontë's own exertion of agency. As Ian Ward asserts, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall's* "stark portrayal of a dysfunctional, abusive marriage… shattered the pretenses of marital harmony so beloved of many Victorians" (151). Ward highlights the shocked reception of Brontë's novel, proving her ability to write impassioned pieces. Brontë presents the female sufferer as a survivor, and through this technique, discusses

female independence. Though her heroine is downtrodden by her corrupt marriage, she finds freedom. In Helen's diary, she writes, "I have devised another scheme… I should not doubt of its success… I might live there [Wildfell Hall], with my child, under an assumed name, and still support myself by my favourite art" (340-341). Helen exerts agency through her choice to leave her husband just as Brontë exerts agency to craft unconventional characters. Furthermore, to leave her husband, Helen crafts a new name for herself—Graham. Her name change parallels Brontë's pseudonym. "I desire my present abode to be concealed… I take the precaution to give a false name to the place also, in order to put them on a wrong scent, if they should attempt to trace me out by it" (38). Helen's name impacts her life in two significant ways. First, she safely protects herself and her son from her husband's influence. Second, she has a chance to begin life anew and paints to secure an income. Likewise, Anne Brontë's "name change" or "name shield" influenced her authorial presence in two major ways. First, it protected her from public scrutiny, and second, it allowed her to be taken seriously as a novelist. Subsequently, her disguise allowed her to enter the literary market.

In her preface, Brontë penned unconventional statements as a female writer. "I feel it my duty to speak an unpalatable truth, with the help of God, I *will* speak it" (Brontë xxv). Anne Brontë needed to write—she needed to uncover injustice. By absolving Helen from her errors and praising her newfound education, Brontë portrayed a character that challenged Victorian norms, and moreover mimicked her own unconventional and independent source of female agency.

Part II: Lucy Snowe and the Role of the Narrator

Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* hosts an uncommon protagonist. Unattractive, orphaned, and self-contained, Lucy Snowe purposely withholds information from her reader and characters. Her action (or inaction) is her power. When Ginerva Fanshawe asks Lucy, "Who *are* you, Miss Snowe?," she responds "Who am I indeed? Perhaps a personage in disguise. Pity I don't look the character" (346). In *Villette*, Lucy exerts agency because she is the narrator and commander of the written text. Furthermore, she masks her inner self by conducting herself differently with her different peers. But when she reveals herself more intimately, she finds ultimate freedom. In this section of my thesis, I will describe how Lucy exerts agency as a narrator and through her interpersonal relations. Lastly, I will connect Lucy's actions with Charlotte Brontë's pen name and experiences.

Finding her in an art gallery, M. Emmanuel declares, "How dare you, a young person, sit coolly down, with the self-possession of a garçon, and look at *that* picture?" (228). The picture he refers to is a large, mostly naked portrait of Cleopatra. By calling her a "garçon"—a boy—M. Emmanuel calls Lucy's behavior masculine. Lucy narrates: "I had a certain pleasure in keeping cool, and working him up" (228). Her pleasure comes from control and the ability to control others. By composing herself so coolly, she has influence over a male authority figure. Lucy's actions in the art gallery indicate her character. Hilary Fraser remarks, "We come away from this scene with a sense… of the keen-eyed spectator and independently minded art critic, Lucy Snowe, who preferred to be left alone rather than endure the sociability of gallery culture" (76). Fraser's painting of Lucy—the independent and critical woman—bespeaks Lucy's narration. She carves herself out as an observer—of people and of social situations. By sitting in the background, Lucy is able to form crucial insights without disclosing her judgment, and distances

her from others. Lucy's distance can be seen as self-possession. She exerts agency by knowing without saying, becoming the owner of information. For instance, she conceals from her reader her revelation that Dr. John is Graham Bretton until late in the text and never tells the true fate of M. Emmanuel. But besides fooling her reader, Lucy masks herself from her fellow characters.

An example of Lucy's enigmatic nature and resultant agency is her relationship with Madame Beck. Lucy claims, "I gave her only the crust and rind of my nature. No matter she expected of me nothing better—she knew me too well to look for compliments" (535). Lucy's relationship with Madame Beck is surface-level; Lucy accepts Madame Beck's snooping and quirks for the position she has been given. "Madame had her own system for managing and regulating…"Surveillance," "espionage,"—these were her watchwords…Madame's system was not bad—let me do her justice…" (81). Lucy allows Madame Beck's interference to the extent that it does not affect her personally. But, when Madame Beck tells her she cannot marry M. Emmanuel, Lucy declares, "*Leave me*, I say! ... I forbid it. Let me alone. Keep your hand off me, and my life, and my troubles. Oh, Madame! In *your* hand there is both chill and poison. You envenom and you paralyze" (503). Lucy's glaring declaration gives her power over Madame Beck. "Two minutes I stood over Madame, feeling that the whole woman was in my power…" and "I saw underneath a being heartless, self-indulgent, and ignoble" (504). Lucy exerts agency over Madame Beck by cutting to the core of Madame's intimate thoughts. She understands that Madame Beck wants what Lucy has—the love and trust of M. Emmanuel. And instead of bowing to Madame Beck's wishes, she denies Madame Beck any ownership over her.

Lucy's autonomy is dependent on her opinions and readership of others. Her knowledge of others is constant in the text—"I knew his feelings, utterly unspoken as they were" (481) –"I wished him success; and successful I knew he would be" (489)— "I knew she secretly wanted

him, and had always wanted him" (503)—"M. de Bassompierre did not well know *me*, but I knew *him*" (514). In these instances, Lucy's legitimacy as a narrator rides on her understanding of others. Because she is the narrator, her observations are the only descriptions readers have to trust. Even though Lucy can be considered unreliable because she withholds information, the subjectivity of the text is purely her own and subsequently her narration colors the reader's experience.

Though Lucy deceives others, she does so through self-control. Jon Hodge argues that Lucy "manipulates various forms of mental fixation in order to find her authorial voice" (900). Hodge's "mental fixation" refers to Lucy's response to others—"Lucy's self-assessment resists a man who would make her the object of his interpretive gaze. One way she achieves resistance is by denying her male interlocutor his language. When John speaks in the language of nerves, Lucy speaks of emotion; when Paul speaks in the language of courage, Lucy speaks of nerves" (901). Hodge assesses that Lucy can control situations by denying what others observe. I agree and assert that Lucy not only denies the character's speech, but she achieves agency through this denial. When Lucy becomes ill because she cared for the sick and lame child left at the Rue Fossette over the holidays, M. Emmanuel says "Then limited are your powers, for in tending one idiot you fell sick." Lucy responds, "Not with that, Monsieur; I had a nervous fever: my mind was ill" (232). By denying M. Emmanuel's assertion, Lucy asserts her dominance of opinion. She claims that her caretaking powers were not limited, but that her mind was uneasy. When Dr. John asks, "Your nervous system bore a good share of the suffering?," Lucy responds, "I am not quite sure what my nervous system is, but I was dreadfully low-spirited" (209). As Hodge asserts, Lucy denies Dr. John's comment on her nervous system by saying the illness was a consequence of her emotional well-being. Lucy's responses indicate more than denial—they

indicate the power of personal opinion. Lucy's replies to Dr. John and M. Emmanuel are inverted—she claims the opposite of what each say and consequently contradicts herself. Though she contradicts herself, it allows her to take control of her own condition. And therefore, when she needs assistance from others, she still attempts to assert power.

Beverly Forsyth argues that the "inward voices that torment, tease, and direct Lucy fill a masochistic[2] need" (18). Forsyth backs up her claim by noting that though Lucy does not want to teach English or act in the play, she does so because "to accept the challenge will assure her attention even though she believes she will fail in the attempt. Even negative attention is attention" (19). Forsyth's reading relies on Lucy's need for pain. While I acknowledge Forsyth's reading that Lucy craves attention, I would argue that Lucy does not choose situations because of the pain she will undergo, but she is either forced into them or wants to undertake them. When Lucy comes to Villette, she has no family or circumstance to help her—she must take part in a profession out of necessity. When she takes part in the play, it is because M. Emmanuel demands it and she wants to appeal to him. "Play you must. I will not have you shrink, or frown, or make the prude. I read your skull that night you came; I see your moyens: play you can; play you must (150). Though it is disputable that Lucy could have said no, she does not say yes out of sadism. Instead, "looking up at M. Paul, and seeing in his vexed, fiery, and searching eye, a sort of appeal behind all its menace, my lips dropped the word "oui"" (151). M. Emmanuel piques Lucy's interest. As a result, her answer "drops from her lips" because of "a sort of appeal". These words are among the first indicators that Lucy is sexually attracted to M. Emmanuel. She chooses to act not to gain negative attention through self-torture, but to attain positive attention from the man who interests her.

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[2] At times in the article, Forsyth also calls Lucy "sadistic" and "sadomasochist" (20). For the purpose of this paper, I am only discussing her use of "masochism".

On another level, when Lucy decides to act in the play, she takes on a pseudo-masculine identity. She refuses to dress in fully male garb, and when M. Emmanuel asks her "How accept a man's part, and go on the stage dressed as a woman?" Lucy responds "I will, Monsieur; but it must be arranged in my own way: nobody must meddle; the things must not be forced upon me. Just let me dress myself" **(**157). Lucy is the agent of her decision; she will not undertake directions imposed on her. Instead, she proves she can control herself and the situations around her. Additionally, Lucy's half-male identity parallels Brontë's gender-ambiguous pseudonym. "Retaining my woman's garb without the slightest retrenchment, I merely assumed, in addition, a little vest, a collar, and cravat, and a paletôt of small dimensions; the whole being the costume of a brother of one of the pupils" (157). By taking on an androgynous identity, Lucy "retains" her own identity while acting as the male. Similarly, Brontë is a female author, but her androgynous pseudonym allowed her to enter the "stage" of the literary marketplace.

For Lucy, characters are important based on how personally she interacts with them. I surmise that though no character is given true insight into Lucy's complete self, it is M. Emmanuel who knows her better than others. "He should not have cared just then to ask what I thought, or what anybody thought, but he *did* care, and he was too natural to conceal, too impulsive to repress his wish" (350). M. Emmanuel influences Lucy because he is interested in her *for* her. Though much of Lucy's power comes from her ability to separate herself from others, it is her ability to deeply care that gives her ultimate power. With it, she overpowers Madame Beck, she finds happiness with M. Emmanuel, and she comes to find her own independence free from the confines of the Rue Fossette. By observing her as intensely as Lucy observes others, M. Emmanuel understands her. Because of their intimate relationship, Lucy is more vulnerable and cannot manipulate her surroundings.

When M. Emmanuel cares about Lucy's opinion of his speech, she fumbles her words. "I had plenty of praise in my heart; but, alas! no words on my lips. Who *has* words at the right moment? I stammered some lame expressions; but was truly glad when other people, coming up with profuse congratulations, covered my deficiency by their redundancy" (350). While Lucy usually finds a cool approach to her conversations, her diffidence with M. Emmanuel's interest is remarkable. Even though Lucy may lose control because of her feelings for M. Emmanuel, the powerlessness of loving another being results in her ultimate freedom. M. Emmanuel gives her independence—he grants her with a living arrangement and a schoolroom. Upon learning this, Lucy's speech takes a new turn:

> And what did I say to M. Paul Emanuel?... I can no more remember the thoughts or the words of the ten minutes succeeding this disclosure, than I can retrace the experience of my earliest year of life: and yet the first thing distinct to me is the consciousness that I was speaking very fast, repeating over and over again:—"Did you do this, M. Paul? Is this your house? Did you furnish it? Did you get these papers printed? Do you mean me? Am I the directress? Is there another Lucy Snowe? Tell me: say something (545).

Instead of barely speaking, Lucy rushes her speech. Usually controlled by speech, she instead floods him with questions. Moreover, Lucy tells M. Emmanuel everything—she confesses her entire story. "I spoke. All leaped from my lips. I lacked not words now; fast I narrated; fluent I told my tale; it streamed on my tongue" (550). This is narration unchecked—the story with full force. Lucy Snowe is no longer restrained. This freedom of speech gives way to her freedom in life.

Strength through restraint litters Charlotte Brontë's texts—both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe undergo extreme situations and loss of control. While Lucy earns freedom through M.

Emmanuel, she does not get to spend her life with him. Timothy Carens reads Lucy's "broken marriage plot" with a negative view for Lucy. Carens claims M. Emmanuel's death frustrates "the teleological drive of Victorian domestic fiction toward marriage. Internal evidence suggests that this unusual plot twist functions to punish the central character and readers as well for idolizing love and romance" (337). Carens argues punishment comes from Lucy's idolization of M. Emmanuel—her preference for him above God. Carens furthers his argument by claiming that the reader must question the alternate endings Lucy presents. "They may accept the grim reality of an ending written by an offended God – or they may bow the knee to a hopeful vision concocted by the romantic imagination… they are led to form a conclusion that rejects the "impulse to fond idolatry" and acknowledges instead the tragedy endured by a heroine forced to submit to the decree of a jealous deity" (349). The alternatives Carens present are clear—Lucy's end is inauthentic if she marries M. Emmanuel, or it is a result of her idolatry and removal from a Protestant god if he dies. But what Carens argument lacks is the positive view of M. Emmanuel's death. As Carens notes, Lucy's ending is a break from the marriage plot. I argue this end symbolizes freedom. Lucy is able to independently run her own school and take in an income. Therefore, her end is not a product of a spiteful God, but one from a generous author.

Villette is noted for its dark matter—Lucy is orphaned and isolated. At this point in Charlotte Brontë's life, her sisters, her brother, and her mother had died. She dealt with death, sadness, and rejection. Even though Lucy's narrative is not joyous, it is redemptive. She may not receive a happy marriage, but she achieves autonomy. For the majority of the novel, Lucy cannot achieve complete autonomy over others, except in the form of hiding information, because she is controlled by her situation. But when she becomes a schoolmistress, she achieves independence, and when M. Emmanuel dies, she is her own benefactress. Her freedom is an alternative to the

marriage plot—she can run her life independently from a male figure. On Lucy's stint with Catholicism, Gretchen Braun avows that her "confession to the priest ultimately has no healing power—a fact Brontë underlines by having her heroine collapse with physical illness shortly after leaving the church" (204). Braun's point is significant because the church does not alleviate Lucy's distress, and neither is her success produced from it. Carens may read Lucy's end as broken, but Braun's point demonstrates that Lucy is not directly influenced by religion. Therefore, I believe that Lucy's freedom is a product of Charlotte Brontë's wish for a different heroic end. Lucy Snowe is abnormal, reclusive, and exclusive about her life details. But Brontë's choice to make an alternate ending to the marriage plot is perhaps the greatest challenge to patriarchal narrative form in the Victorian age. Her female heroine ends up alone and alive—her progress overrides suffering.

Charlotte Brontë's choice to make Lucy the narrator of her own tale is singular. Though the same strategy is used in *Jane Eyre*, Jane does not shield herself from the reader. Lucy, on the other hand, selects what she will share. As I've noted, this can make her seem unreliable. However, it also gives her strategic agency—she owns her story and exerts control. This method parallels Brontë's use of the pseudonym. By shielding her identity, Brontë kept readers from the knowledge of her background. Lucy gives no information of her childhood and therefore offers no hint of her original identity. Currer Bell revealed herself as Charlotte Brontë in 1848, and when *Villette* was published in 1853, Brontë was well known. Eva Badowska states that "by 1851, Brontë's anonymity was a thing of the past, and she was herself on exhibit, being shown at literary salons as the person behind *Jane Eyre*" (1510). In light of this, Brontë's use of Lucy's shield is more significant. Her story deliberately defied narrative convention—what Matthew Arnold, a contemporary, called a "hideous, undelightful, convulsed, constricted novel" (*Letters*

to Arthur Hugh Clough). Yet, Lucy's position as an unsavory narrator can be read as a defense, and more than a protection, a freedom. When Lucy offers two endings for *Villette*, Brontë presents an unconventional and truly feminist ending for a Victorian novel. Thus, Lucy's restraint may be hideous to Arnold, but as a result, her exertion of agency leads her to a freedom that even the pseudonym could not establish—an ending without a marriage.[3]

Unlike Jane Eyre, Charlotte is linked to Lucy through a narrative thread. M. Emmanuel is considered a narrative reflection of Brontë's Belgian tutor Professor Constantin Heger. She met him while enrolled at his and his wife's boarding school, where she taught English in exchange for room and board. The bare bones of her time in Belgium mimic Lucy's—She is a stranger in a foreign land, attracted to the professor, and a teacher of English. But, however autobiographical Brontë's attachment to Heger may be to Lucy's for M. Emmanuel, it is not what drives Lucy's agency. On her love, Lucy narrates, "in *this* Love I had a vested interest; and whatever tended to eithers its culture or its destruction, I could not view impassibly" (526). In a letter to Heger, Brontë wrote, "If my master withdraws his friendship from me entirely, I shall be absolutely without hope" (*Letters*). Even though Brontë's correspondence with Heger stopped because of her unreciprocated feelings, she narrates a different story for Lucy. Lucy's life seems bereft—she is at different points friendless, unloved, and without opportunity, but she is not hopeless. M. Emmanuel's love changes her life—it allows her great freedom. And, in a concurrent way, Heger's lack of love allowed Brontë autonomy—it led to the narration of Lucy's opportunity. Lucy does not state that she is hopeless without M. Emmanuel, and though I take liberty by connecting Lucy the character to the flesh-and-blood Charlotte Brontë, I believe that Brontë's

[3] In 1854, Charlotte Brontë married Rev. A. B. Nicholls after having previously refused him (much at the suggestion of her father). Evidence suggests she admired him, but did not love him.

maturity from her situation with Heger allowed Lucy to value and understand her love for Emmanuel without a hopeless life after his death.

Lastly, Brontë's contemporaries mistook her in the same way that characters misread Lucy. Brontë's love for Heger was omitted in Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë.* Sandro Jung notes that Gaskell's biography "was a monument which enshrined 'Miss Brontë' as a model for the female professional writer" (299). As Jung notes—the biography enshrined—it protected. Gaskell mummified the image of Brontë by removing the lifeblood of *Villette's* inspiration—Heger or more importantly, the experience of loving and losing. While it presented a key image of the woman writer, it misinterprets what makes her credible as an author of the female experience. Likewise, Lucy asserts that "What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according to the eye with which we are viewed!...learned and blue… a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional, perhaps, too strict, limited…the pink and pattern of governess-correctness" (Brontë 339). Lucy finds these descriptions inaccurate, and I read them as facets of her outer character, rather than her holistic self. Similarly, Brontë's biography is not complete if her relationship with Heger is omitted.

Jung also mentions that reviewers of *Villette* identified Currer Bell "as a female writer who is credited with strong feeling and clear style, yet censured for being 'stern and masculine', as well as capable of a realism founded on experience that was not expected by readers of fiction by women writers" (299). What Jung asserts is essential to Gaskell's choice to omit Heger from Charlotte Brontë's biography. She did not want to place scandal or impropriety on the image of a woman who was credited as a professional. From the 21st century standpoint, I claim that what made Brontë "unexpected", "masculine", and "stern" is completely based on her experience as a female. As I cited in Chapter 2, Judith Butler calls gender "performative" (based on how we act

in relation to society). When M. Emmanuel tells Lucy she has the “self-possession of a garçon”, Lucy is directly working against definitive classifications of what it is to be a woman or a man. What makes Brontë’s gendered experience revolutionary is that she not only wrote under a masculine title, but she exemplified feelings that were considered only “masculine” as part of the female. Heger may have been her muse for M. Emmanuel, but Lucy is her vehicle to illustrate how and why a woman can be free.

Part III: *Middlemarch* and the Function of Female Decisions

In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot spotlights multiple characters throughout the narrative, but focuses on Dorothea Brooke as the central female heroine. The written word directly impacts Dorothea. When men write, it confines her; but when a female writes, it frees her. In this portion of the paper, I aim to explain how *Middlemarch* supports a feminist reading of gendered writing and action, and how these actions connect to George Eliot as an author.

The first man to denounce Dorothea's learnedness is her uncle. "'I wish you would let me sort your papers for you, uncle," said Dorothea." I would letter them all, and then make a list of subjects under each letter."… "No, no," said Mr. Brooke, shaking his head; "I cannot let young ladies meddle with my documents. Young ladies are too flighty." Dorothea felt hurt" (20). In this statement, Mr. Brooke limits women by calling them unprofessional. As Dorothea's caretaker, he is aware of her cleverness, yet does not credit her with proper knowledge. The irony is that Mr. Brooke himself is flighty—or rather, unreliable. In the second chapter of Middlemarch, the narrator describes Brooke's character succinctly yet clearly. "Mr. Brooke's conclusions were as difficult to predict as the weather: it was only safe to say that he would act with benevolent intentions, and that he would spend as little money as possible in carrying them out" (8). Mr. Brooke's unpredictability makes his statement to Dorothea rather ironic. Nonetheless, it initiates a trend of men misunderstanding Dorothea.

Though Mr. Brooke misjudges Dorothea, she too makes an error. Prior to marrying Edward Casaubon, she misreads him. "How could it occur to her to examine the letter, to look at it critically as a profession of love?" (44). For Dorothea, Casaubon's love letter is exactly what she wants—an entrance into a world she has been denied. She does not read the letter as it is: an academic explanation of why two people should be married. Instead, she enthusiastically

responds to him, “I am very grateful to you for loving me, and thinking me worthy to be your wife. I can look forward to no better happiness than that which would be one with yours” (45). What Dorothea seeks with Casaubon is a mentorship—a voyage into academia. She loves what they can offer each other, rather than him as a person. Rebecca Mitchell argues that in Eliot’s fiction, characters must understand the difference between themselves and others. “Having realized the self, one must go further to realize the complexity, difficulty, even the potential impossibility of know- ing the other in order to open up a space for a richer engagement with those whose desires and drives are different from one’s own” (309). Mitchell maintains that Eliot’s characters are fully formed when they can understand themselves in relations to others. In the case of *Middlemarch* and Dorothea, Dorothea matures through self-awareness and understanding of others, which is how she exerts agency. Though she mistakes Casaubon’s true nature, she attempts to make their marriage sustainable. When Will Ladislaw tells her, “You already look paler. It would be better for Mr. Casaubon to have a secretary”, she responds emphatically “I should have no happiness if I did not help him in his work. What could I do? There is no good to be done in Lowick. The only thing I desire is to help him more” (364). Through this dialogue, Dorothea proves that she tries to help Casaubon as best she can. But by shunning her, Casaubon cannot attain rich engagement with her. As a result, Casaubon suffers the fate of an unacknowledged scholar. As Will creates open discourse with Dorothea, and truly attempts to understand her, the two find happiness and serve as an example of Mitchell’s “richer engagement”.

Casaubon’s life work, *A Key to All Mythologies*, is a constant source of anxiety to him. Interestingly, the narrator sympathizes with his journey to authorship, “his religious faith wavered with his wavering trust in his own authorship… Christian hope in immortality seemed

to lean on the immortality of the still unwritten Key to all Mythologies. For my part I am very sorry for him. It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy" (280). *Middlemarch* has been noted for its sympathy, and the narrator sympathizes with Casaubon throughout the text. Nonetheless, Linda Hughes avers, "Through Casaubon's failure to produce manuscript pages…Eliot can argue that authorship divorced from high moral or passionate commitment…is doomed" (158). I agree with Hughes. I believe that Eliot's outcomes for her characters comment on whether the character is worthy of authorship and furthermore, a satisfying ending.

Casaubon may be considered the most serious character in *Middlemarch*, but his writing is discredited. Rosamond Vincy/Lydgate, on the other hand, exemplifies the "flightiness" that Mr. Brooke typified as characteristic of young women. Yet, when she writes a short letter to Will Ladislaw, it has a tremendous effect. What is highly important is that the gravest character and the vainest character write and achieve opposite outcomes. After her conversation and confession with Dorothea, Rosamond writes a note to Ladislaw. "I have told Mrs. Casaubon. She is not under any mistake about you. I told her because she came to see me and was very kind. You will have nothing to reproach me with now. I shall not have made any difference to you" (804). Though Rosamond's note is saturated with her own self-interest, her action is exceptionally important. Likewise, Casaubon's will is a product of his own self-satisfaction and attempts to make an important point. Both characters want to preserve their image, yet Rosamond frees Ladislaw and Dorothea, while Casaubon cages them. "Mr. Casaubon had taken a cruelly effective means of hindering her: even with indignation against him in her heart, any act that seemed a triumphant eluding of his purpose revolted her" (493). For Dorothea, Casaubon's will

reveals his nature—jealousy from deep-seated insecurity. Though the narrator shows there is sympathy for Casaubon, Hughes's point that he is morally ineffective rings true.

Dorothea exerts agency for herself when she seals her future. "'Oh, I cannot bear it—my heart will break," said Dorothea, starting from her seat, the flood of her young passion bearing down all the obstructions which had kept her silent—the great tears rising and falling in an instant: "I don't mind about poverty—I hate my wealth."" (811). Dorothea's choice becomes the gateway to her happiness and marriage with Will Ladislaw. Though Will ardently speaks about his love, Dorothea makes their union possible. Her words invert Casaubon's and she marks her dominance[4] over the male authority figure who confined her life.

Unlike the Brontës and their heroines, Dorothea cannot align with Eliot through a name change or as a narrator. Instead, she parallels Eliot through her sensitivity to others. By actively seeking to help others, Dorothea achieves what Henry Alley calls "anonymous heroism". He claims that in *Middlemarch*, Eliot creates a cast of "subterranean intellectuals" and specifically that "While all the subterranean intellectuals could be said to attain anonymous heroism, no one perceives it quite so clearly as Dorothea. It is for this reason, of course, that the novel must end so perfectly, with its focus on her, since her consciousness must shade into the reader's" (128). Alley argues that Dorothea's consciousness acts as a double for the reader's through her moral authority. Alley further claims, "for the heroine as for Eliot, people must be judged by their good intentions rather than the visible effects of their actions" (129). In other words, it is not the deed, but the thought behind the deed that makes a person good.

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[4] Though writing is a common convention to portray thoughts, emotions, and ideas, the difference between a written proposal and a spoken one is that writing distances the addresser from the addressee. When Casaubon writes "I should presumably have gone on to the last without any attempt to lighten my solitariness by a matrimonial union" (44)—he is not romantically proposing to Dorothea, but academically wooing her. When Dorothea proposes to Will, she is speaking emotionally and freely. Not only can spoken word be more powerful, but it can convey meaning that is lost in the processes of writing. I in no way diminish the importance of writing in *Middlemarch*, but it seems that the differences between Dorothea's courtship with Casaubon and her courtship with Ladislaw shows Eliot's opinion of romantic connection and narrative justice.

Dorothea is read as a St. Theresa figure in the text—"there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life"—she is nearly perfect (838). What Eliot achieves with Dorothea though is not a famous heroine, but one that becomes anonymously heroic through her sensitivity to others. Eliot wanted fame and she received it as "George Eliot". But the name "George Eliot" has replaced Marian/Mary Ann Evans/Lewes/Cross. Her constant changing of names indicates an uncertainty she had in herself. In a letter on Marian's identity, Henry Lewes wrote, "Please don't write or tell Marian anything *unpleasant* that you hear unless it is important for her to hear it. She is so very sensitive and has a tendency to dwell on and believe unpleasant ideas" (*The George Eliot Letters*). Eliot's personal sensitivity leads to her sensitivity towards her characters, and as a result, Dorothea's anonymous heroism is funneled through Eliot's own sensitivity. In this way, though Dorothea does not directly exert agency through unconventional standards, she does serve a point. In Eliot's novel on the characteristics of human nature, her main female character is her most moral character. Therefore, Eliot comments on the importance of virtue and the strength that lies within women.

The greatest link between Marian Evans and her protagonist is the belief that good acts are not validated by status or fame, but how their significance affects others. *Middlemarch* ends with Dorothea's impact: "the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs" (838). Dorothea's end proves that the good of many is disguised by anonymity. Catherine Gallagher believes that, "when the Dorotheas appear on the other side of the novel's final triptych, we understand that they might be women who spend their lives in feats of compassionate particularization" (70).

Gallagher's "compassionate particularization" mimics Alley's "anonymous heroism". Through sympathetically helping individuals, these women offered aid without a need for acclaim. Likewise, Eliot can be seen as a sympathetic anonymous heroine. At the finale of *Middlemarch*, the narrator decries, "we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know" (838). Here, Eliot uses her novel to comment on herself. She, as the implied author, has the power to create stories that may not contain the happiness Dorothea finds. Yet, she finds a narrative solution for her Dorothea. Eliot's admonishment of herself as "insignificant" is harsh. George Eliot is widely famous even today, though she is rarely referred to her by her born name. Mary Ann Evans may exist anonymously, but the feats of George Eliot prove that an author's agency rests less on her male title, and more on her ability to exert agency.

Conclusion

An author's public image rests on her reputation to create engaging content. But without the opportunity to be fully accepted in the literary marketplace, a woman's content is not fully explored and appreciated. Joanna Russ argued that in its "most subtle form, the denial of agency takes the form: A woman did not write this because the woman who wrote it is more than a woman" (23). In the case of the writer, to be more than a woman is to imply that a woman is not inherently intellectual. Russ maintains that female authors are discredited based on their sex. In the case of George Eliot and the Brontë sisters, they were immensely strong agents because they were women. I have provided evidence that the pseudonym allowed these women to pen texts concerning women of strength and integrity. The Brontë sisters and George Eliot fought against sexist societal confines by discussing Victorian women's roles, circumstances, and inequities. There is no possible solution for inequality without a constant battle against it. Through literary exertions of agency, these authors expanded a discussion of women's possibilities. In order to change dominant systems of thought, they challenged normative standards of behavior to prove that unconventionality is often at the root of freedom.

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